

Writing a Great Research Paper: Formatting Your Paper Study Guide

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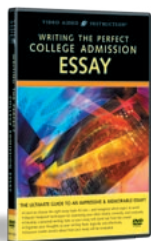
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Writing a Great Research Paper: Formatting Your Paper Study Guide

Introduction

The formatting of your research paper can make or break its presentation—and that can have a significant impact on your grade! This comprehensive program covers mechanical details like fonts, margins, and spacing and provides an extensive overview of style guides like Chicago, Turabian, APA, and MLA and their varying approaches to references, footnotes, and bibliographies.

For easier studying and maximum success, we recommend that you view the program over a number of short sessions: don't try to absorb too much at one time. Review the entire program, or specific sections, as many times as you find necessary in order to master the material.

Perhaps most importantly: Don't forget to take advantage of your "pause" button while viewing the program. Keep plenty of scrap paper handy so you can jot down ideas, work through concepts, and more. And finally, be sure to use the myriad on-screen graphics to take notes for yourself—when you're done, you'll have a notebook you can refer back to again and again.

About Your Instructor

Karl Weber, M.A., is an educator, editor, and bestselling author in fields ranging from business to politics to test preparation. He has worked on books with such noted figures as management guru Adrian Slywotzky, Loews Hotels CEO Jonathan M. Tisch, and President Jimmy Carter.

Part 1: Your Guide to Style Guides

The first step in formatting your research paper is in some ways the most important: you must determine which style guide you're going to follow—APA, MLA, Chicago, Turabian, etc. Each style guide offers its own guidelines for citing sources, listing references, and other stylistic conventions. **Before you continue**, consult with your teachers or professors regarding which style guide is appropriate for their discipline and therefore which style guide they prefer. Be warned: Using the wrong style in your research paper can have a very negative impact on your grade!

Myriad websites and other resources exist that intend to offer sample citations in each of these styles, but they can be disorganized, poorly edited, out-of-date, etc.—they simply cannot substitute for the official word of the experts, and neither can this program. Therefore, we instead suggest that you **always consult one of the official style guides**. Obviously, always use the **most current edition available**:

- **APA style:** *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*. 5th ed. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2001. [apastyle.apa.org]
- **MLA style:** *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*. 6th ed. New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2003. [mla.org/style]
- **Chicago style:** *The Chicago Manual of Style*. 15th ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003. [chicagomanualofstyle.org/books.html & chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html]
- **Turabian style:** Turabian, Kate L. *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*, 6th edition. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.

We realize that some of these manuals are significant purchases, but they are usually available to use in your library, and they do constitute an investment that will likely last you most of your academic career. If no guidance regarding a style guide is available from the assignment itself, from your syllabus, or from your teachers, your professors, or your institution, we suggest that you follow Chicago style.

Part 2: Making Your Paper Look Good

To earn a high grade, your finished research paper must leave your teachers or professors with a very positive impression; so be sure that the formatting of your paper demonstrates that you:

- fully understand the concepts of scholarly research and writing,
- take the assignment and the subject matter very seriously, and
- have researched your topic thoroughly,
- have put lots of thought into the structure and logic of your writing, and
- care about even the littlest details.

The style guide you're using (and the assignment and/or course syllabus from your teacher or professor) may contain very specific guidelines that you must adhere to regarding font choices, sizes, spacing, margins, etc. (Some teachers and professors are real sticklers when it comes to formatting, and some may even offer their own particular sets of formatting guidelines.) Just remember to follow any instructions you're given to the letter.

Note: The formatting tips that we're about to outline differ here and there from those set forth in the style guides to APA style and MLA style; they're typically more in line with the Chicago/Turabian approach. If you're using APA or MLA style—or even Chicago or Turabian, for that matter—be sure to check your style guide before following these recommendations. Otherwise, if you have some latitude in making your own formatting decisions, we offer the following suggestions.

Writing a Great Research Paper: Formatting Your Paper

Fonts

The default font in many word processing programs, including many versions of Microsoft Word™, is:
Times New Roman

Of course, you can elect to use Times New Roman for the main text of your research paper; it's a good, reliable typeface. In fact, many assignments require that you use 12-point Times New Roman because it "levels the playing field." This certainly makes it easier for teachers and professors to estimate word counts, and Times New Roman's ubiquity has rendered it rather flavorless: it can help the reader focus on the writing (and not be distracted by the presentation).

On the other hand, to help your research paper stand out from the crowd, you may wish to consider choosing a typeface that's a bit more distinctive than Times New Roman. Depending on what fonts are available in your specific system, try to choose one that is still a classic serif typeface with medium-to-large lowercase letters, but also a little more off the beaten path. You'll want a typeface that is serious, time-tested, and easy to read like Times New Roman, but is perhaps a bit more elegant and refined—a typeface that your teachers and professors might not even notice *isn't* Times New Roman, but will add a little extra flair to your research paper nonetheless. Consider fonts like:

Georgia · Constantia · Cambria · Book Antiqua/Palatino · Century Schoolbook
Hoefler Text · Bookman Old Style · Calisto · Trump Mediaeval · Caslon · Minion

For legibility's sake, we **don't** recommend choosing a typeface that is too fancy, too dark, too light, or too quirky, or one that is an old fashioned serif typeface with relatively small lowercase letters. This would include fonts like:

Modern No. 20 · Bodoni · Footlight · Bernhard Modern
Californian · Baskerville · Garamond · Bembo · Goudy Old Style

In addition, **don't** choose a monospaced typeface (where every letter, space, symbol, and punctuation mark occupies the same space left-to-right). This would include fonts that are meant to resemble a typewriter or intended to be used in computer programming, such as:

Courier · Prestige · Consolas · Lucida Console

Also, because sans serif typefaces can sometimes imply a less formal tone than serif typefaces, for the main text of your paper we recommend that you **don't** use a sans serif typeface, such as:

Arial/Helvetica · Verdana · Trebuchet · Calibri · Candara · Corbel · Tahoma · Segoe
Century Gothic/Avant Garde · Myriad · Franklin Gothic · Lucida Sans/Grande · Gill Sans

That said, for titles, etc., a sans serif typeface **can** be very appropriate, providing a nice contrast with the serif typeface you use for the text of your paper. Choose one that complements the serif typeface you've chosen; for example, you could experiment with pairing titles, etc. set in Candara with body text set in Constantia.

Finally, **don't** use any script, handwriting, or other so-called display fonts—these are ornamental by nature and not really appropriate for formal writing like research papers. This would include fonts like:

Papyrus · **Impact** · French Script · **Sand** · Comic Sans

Underlining, Italics, Bold, and Color

As a general rule, unless you're using MLA style, do not underline text. Instead, set in *italics* any text that a) you want to emphasize; b) came from a foreign language; or c) is the title of a research source. Don't use any **bold type** or "ALL CAPS" text in your research paper, except perhaps for the title of your research paper on your title page or for the word "Bibliography," "References," etc. on the page that lists your references. And don't use any color in your research paper, except perhaps in charts, tables, maps, and other figures that you may be including.

Size and Spacing

Set your text size to **12 point** (or perhaps 10 or 11 point) for your main body text, and set your citations and bibliographic entries slightly smaller and your title on your title page slightly larger. Set your character spacing (a.k.a. tracking) to **normal**. (In Microsoft Word™ or OpenOffice Writer, these settings are usually found within “Font” or “Character” under the “Format” menu or by accessing “Font” in a toolbar.) Also, for the main text of your paper, set your line spacing (a.k.a. leading) to **double**. For notes and bibliographic references, choose **single** line spacing, skipping a line between notes and bibliographic entries. (In Microsoft Word and OpenOffice Writer, these settings are usually found within “Paragraph” under the “Format” menu or by accessing “Paragraph” in a toolbar.) Don’t increase the font size, character spacing, or line spacing to try to make a shorter paper appear longer! Also, remember to type **only one space** after punctuation marks like periods, commas, colons, and semicolons.

Indentation

Indent the first line of each paragraph by ½", and indent any block quotations by an additional ½". When trying to create consistent indentation, we recommend setting tabs instead of entering a string of spaces. Pay careful attention to the way the first lines of footnotes and bibliographic entries are indented.

Margins and Justification

We recommend the standard 1" margins on all sides. However, you might also want to experiment with a left margin of 0.6" and a right margin of 1.4"—this will leave your teachers or professors more room to write notes in the right margin. (In Microsoft Word, these settings are typically found within “Page Setup” under the “File” menu or by accessing “Headers & Footers” in a toolbar. In OpenOffice Writer, these settings are typically found under “Page” within the “Format” menu.) Again, don’t increase the margins to try to make a shorter paper appear longer! Also, set your text left-justified (a.k.a. “flush left” or “ragged right”—justified with the left margin but not the right margin) and without hyphenation.

Title Page

If your research paper is somewhat long—say, 7–10 pages or so—it’s a nice touch to include a simple title page as the cover of your paper. Centered on this page, about 3" down from the top margin, include: the complete title of your paper (perhaps in **bold** type), and then (a few lines down) your name, the date, and your class name or course designation. (You may also wish to include the name of your teacher or professor and the name of your institution.) Don’t include any colored text, pictures, or graphics on this title page.

Header and Pagination

We recommend including a header at the top of each page that is ½" from the top edge of the page. Include your name (perhaps only your last name, left-justified or “flush left”), an abbreviated title of your paper (centered and perhaps *italicized*), and the page number (right-justified or “flush right”). The title page should count as page #1, but the header information should only show on the subsequent pages (starting with page #2). (In Microsoft Word, these settings are usually found within “Header and Footer” under the “View” menu or by accessing “Headers & Footers” in a toolbar. In OpenOffice Writer, headers are usually created with “Page Styles.”)

Binding and Paper

Here’s another situation where a quick conversation with your teachers or professors can give you important guidance that may actually boost your grade. Ask them exactly how they like research papers to be “held together”—do they prefer paper clips, plastic sleeves, covers, binders, etc.? As a general rule, you should choose a binding method that’s easy to remove and replace (perhaps just a simple paper clip).

As far as paper goes, try to choose a smooth, bright white, letter-sized (8½ × 11") paper. The paper you use should be heavier, brighter, and of better quality than general purpose laser printer or photocopier paper. At your local stationery or office supply store, this kind of paper might be described with words like “smooth” or “wove” and be called something like “résumé paper,” “letterhead paper,” or “thesis paper.” A quick aside: For research papers, we recommend avoiding paper that is textured to the touch (often described with words like “laid” or “linen”).

Part 3: Citing Sources: Parenthetical References & Footnotes

Again, it is **crucial** that you consult the current edition of the official style guide that your teacher or professor has recommended, especially regarding parenthetical references and footnotes. These resources provide detailed examples that cover almost every conceivable type of research source you're likely to encounter. The style guides we listed in **Part 1** are the authorities: we'll provide you with some quick examples in the next few pages, but don't be tempted to use any book, website, or "cheat sheet" as a substitute for the real thing! (Again, if you are able to choose on your own, we recommend Chicago.)

For your reference, here's a quick recap of some of the various styles of parenthetical references and footnotes:

APA style ("author-date") <i>parenthetical references</i>	A full in-text reference might "look like this" (Doe & Roe, 2005, pp. 3–7). Doe and Roe (2005) suggest a partial reference might "look like this" (pp. 3–7).
MLA style <i>parenthetical references</i>	A full in-text reference might "look like this" (Doe and Roe 3–7). Doe and Roe suggest a partial reference might "look like this" (3–7).
Chicago & Turabian style <i>footnotes</i>	Doe and Roe give examples for footnoting books⁸ and online journal articles⁹ within your research paper. ⁸John Doe and Jane Roe, "Book Article Title in Quotes with Important Words Capitalized," <i>Book Title Italicized with Important Words Capitalized: Subtitle Italicized with Important Words Capitalized</i>, 7th ed. (New York: University of Manhattan Press, 2005), 3–7. ⁹John Doe and Jane Roe, "Journal Article Title in Quotes with Important Words Capitalized," <i>Journal Title Italicized with Important Words Capitalized: Subtitle Italicized with Important Words Capitalized</i> 132 (2005), 3–7, http://www.journalwebsite.org/page.html (accessed March 1, 2007).

Obviously, be sure to follow the exact guidelines provided in the style guide. Pay extra careful attention to the "building blocks" of your references or footnotes, especially:

- the order of the information,
- the indentation and spacing of lines,
- the use of quotation marks, italics, and underlining,
- the use and placement of punctuation marks (periods, commas, parentheses, colons, etc.),
- the capitalization (or lack thereof),
- the use of abbreviations and ampersands, and
- for footnotes, the numbering and sequencing—and the use of superscripting.

In most word processing programs, parenthetical references (such as those used in APA style or MLA style) must be typed manually into the text of your research paper. By contrast, if you're using footnotes, many programs can usually handle some of the task of placing and numbering your notes for you automatically. (In Microsoft Word™, you typically choose "Reference" and then "Footnote" under the "Insert" menu or access "Footnotes" via a toolbar. In OpenOffice Writer, these settings are usually found within "Footnotes" under the "Tools" menu.) To learn more about the in's and out's of this kind of process, look up "footnotes" or "references" in the Help section or User's Guide of the software program you are using to create your research paper.

And don't forget: With APA and MLA styles, if your introduction to a quote or paraphrase included the author's name, the date, etc., don't repeat that information in your parenthetical reference.

A final thought on footnotes: Some style guides advocate endnotes instead of footnotes; this is when all of your footnote-type citations appear together at the **end** of your paper in one consolidated list. We feel that this method of organizing your citations is preferable for a book but not for a research paper. For research papers, we recommend footnotes instead of endnotes, but choose whichever method your teachers or professors prefer.

Part 4: Scholarly Use of Abbreviations

Some of the more common abbreviations and phrases used in scholarly research are:

- p., pp. = page, pages
- vol., chap., pt. = volume, chapter, part
- *ibid.* = *ibidem* = the same source just cited
- *op. cit.* = *opus citatum* = the source cited earlier
- *cf.* = *confer* = compare (as in *Cf. some other source*)
- *et al.* = *et alia* = and others (as in *Henderson, et al.*)
- *e.g.* = *exempli gratia* = for example
- *i.e.* = *id est* = that is
- *passim* = throughout
- *infra* = below
- *supra* = above
- *viz.* = *videlicet* = namely

Part 5: Citing Sources: *Bibliography*

It is also **crucial** that you consult the current edition of the official style guide that your teacher or professor has recommended regarding bibliographies. (Again, if you are able to choose on your own, we suggest using Chicago.) We recommend you use the title "Bibliography" for the list of resources at the end of your paper; other alternatives include "References," "Sources," "Works Cited," "Selected Sources," "Sources Consulted," etc. (Note: APA style prefers the title "References," while MLA style generally recommends the "Works Cited.")

By the way, there are some websites that let you enter just a quick snippet of information about a resource—for example, its ISBN—and claim to then return to you an exact bibliographical entry for that item in APA, MLA, Chicago, Turabian, and other styles. For example:

- OttoBib [ottobib.com]
- EasyBib [easybib.com]

Tools like these can be a real timesaver, but we advise you to double check their output against the official style guides themselves, just to be safe!

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For your reference, here's a quick recap of some of the various styles of bibliographic entries:

APA style bibliographic entries	References Doe, J., & Roe, J. (2005). Book article title not in quotes with only the first word capitalized. <i>Main book title italicized with only the first word capitalized: Subtitle italicized with only the first word capitalized.</i> (7th ed.). New York: University of Manhattan Press. Doe, J., & Roe, J. (2005). Journal article title not in quotes with only the first word capitalized. <i>Main Journal Title Italicized with Important Words Capitalized: Subtitle Italicized with Important Words Capitalized</i> , 132, 3-7. Retrieved March 1, 2007, from http://www.journalwebsite.org/page.html .
MLA style bibliographic entries	Works Cited (or References or Bibliography) Doe, John, and Jane Roe. "Book Article Title in Quotes with Important Words Capitalized." <u>Main Book Title Underlined with Important Words Capitalized: Subtitle Underlined with Important Words Capitalized.</u> 7th ed. New York: U of Manhattan P, 2005. Doe, John, and Jane Roe. "Journal Article Title in Quotes with Important Words Capitalized." <u>Main Journal Title Underlined with Important Words Capitalized: Subtitle Underlined with Important Words Capitalized</u> 132 (2005): 3-7. 1 Mar. 2007 < http://www.journalwebsite.org/page.html >.
Chicago & Turabian style bibliographic entries	Bibliography (or Works Cited or References) Doe, John, and Jane Roe. "Book Article Title in Quotes with Important Words Capitalized." <i>Main Book Title Italicized with Important Words Capitalized: Subtitle Italicized with Important Words Capitalized.</i> 7th ed. New York: University of Manhattan Press, 2005. Doe, John, and Jane Roe. "Journal Article Title in Quotes with Important Words Capitalized." <i>Main Journal Title Italicized with Important Words Capitalized: Subtitle Italicized with Important Words Capitalized</i> 132 (2005): 3-7. http://www.journalwebsite.org/page.html (accessed March 1, 2007).

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Remember to follow the exact guidelines provided in the style guide you are using. Be especially mindful of the various elements that make up your bibliographic entries, specifically:

- the order of the information,
- the indentation and spacing of lines,
- the use of quotation marks, italics, and underlining,
- the use and placement of punctuation marks (periods, commas, parentheses, colons, etc.),
- the capitalization (or lack thereof),
- the use of abbreviations and ampersands, and
- the alphabetization.

A final word of warning: Regardless of the style guide you're following, **ALWAYS** follow your teachers' or professors' requirements—and any guidelines offered by the syllabus and your school or college—to the letter, even if their instructions disagree with those presented in an official style guide. ***After all, remember who's grading your paper!***